



Project Rewild Zambezi

Project Summary

For reasons beyond their choosing, thousands of wild animals find themselves behind the fences of a reserve in Zimbabwe that cannot sustain them. Humanity is now faced with a choice – resign to the notion that we must reduce a few thousand animals to save the remaining population or stand up and help save innocent and endangered species. We are choosing to stand and help.

Project Rewild Zambezi is an emergency conservation initiative that aims to prevent the culling of over 3,000 animals — including elephants, wild dogs, lions, eland, impala, zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, and other species. Because of prolonged drought conditions, the Savé Valley Conservancy – one of the largest private game reserves in Africa – has determined they are beyond carrying capacity. Wildlife authorities have advised that the Conservancy must either kill or relocate the animals. With the permission of Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority, Great Plains Foundation and Great Plains Conservation will lead one of the largest wildlife translocations in history.

As of September 2022, Great Plains Foundation has successfully completed the first phase of the translocation effort comprised of 101 elephants and 184 impalas. This smaller scale, successful translocation lays the groundwork, provides lessons learned and establishes best practice within the team for larger scale translocations between May and August 2023, including 300 additional elephants.

Project Details

The Savé Valley Conservancy (SVC), located in the Southeastern lowveld in Zimbabwe, contains roughly 750,000 acres of diverse wildlife habitat and is home to most Southern African wildlife species, including elephant, lion, wild dogs, leopard, rhino, and buffalo. The Conservancy consists of privately owned, government-owned, and community-owned properties that are aligned under a constitution to manage animal populations on a landscape scale. SVC conducts annual aerial surveys and road strip counts which are used to determine trends, spatial distribution, and social organization of large herbivore populations – all of which are used to inform management decisions on carrying capacity. Additionally, individual ranches keep records of annual rainfall which can vary significantly across the Conservancy, and monitor the state of vegetation — grasses, browse, tree cover, and soil quality. ZimParks determined the land can no longer support the current wildlife population and have decided that SVC must either (1) cull/hunt 3,200 animals from the population or (2) translocate the animals to a new location.

Great Plains' Sapi Reserve is the perfect location to provide long-term protection for thousands of displaced wildlife. In 2017, Great Plains Conservation was awarded a 25-year lease with renewal options for the 250,000-acre Sapi Reserve. Great Plains jointly manages this important Buffer Zone in the Middle Zambezi Biosphere Reserve with Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks). Tragically, decades of hunting decimated Sapi's wildlife populations including iconic species such as lion,



elephant, and the critically endangered black rhino which was eliminated from the landscape entirely. When Great Plains began managing the land in 2017, we immediately put a stop to all hunting and established a small sustainable, non-consumptive tourism footprint to help restore the Sapi ecosystem.

Relocating SVC's wildlife to the Sapi Reserve holds the potential to restore biodiversity in the area and provide a platform for scientific research that will enrich the conversation about relocation and rewilding efforts. This is an urgently needed project to prevent the mass culling of savable wildlife. Once relocated to Sapi, wildlife will be unrestricted by artificial borders, free to roam and repopulate the entire lower Zambezi Valley.

In short, this project will save nearly 3000 from being killed; seeing them instead released into the center of unique and iconic ecosystem on banks of the Zambezi River, an amazing opportunity for both these animals and the wider Zambezi Valley.

Project Update September 2022 – Phase 1 Complete!

As of September 2022, Project Rewild Zambezi has successfully translocated the first 101 elephants on a close to 1,000km journey across Zimbabwe from the Savé Valley Conservancy to Great Plains Conservation's private Sapi Reserve.

The wildlife translocations to date have been a successful collaboration between the Government of Zimbabwe, Great Plains Conservation and its Foundation, Zimbabwe National Parks (ZimParks), Savé Valley Conservancy and Sango Wildlife Conservancy to maintain healthy ecosystems and wildlife populations and support local community investment.

The physical translocations are limited to a narrow time window during southern Africa's dry months each year, ensuring optimum translocation conditions for the welfare of the wildlife (temperatures, water availability, vegetation density etc.). The translocations, a



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collaboration of highly experienced and world-renowned experts, are planned over two years, and supported by long-term monitoring.

Following extensive feasibility assessments, this year saw inclusive collaborative stakeholder discussions, infrastructural preparation, security, and planning, ending with the successful darting and translocation of 184 impala and the first 101 elephants (captured, moved and released in their family herds). Starting the project with this small, successful translocation has laid the groundwork and planning for the translocations in 2023.

Once released in the Great Plains-managed Sapi Reserve, the animals remain under close monitoring and management, including rangers with specialized equipment supported by both aerial and ground support and regional antipoaching units. The long-term increase in security, monitoring and movement data in the region, in partnership with ZimParks, will act as an extra barrier and support for local communities for human-wildlife coexistence by ensuring any potential issues are observed and addressed early and efficiently.



The inclusive collaboration with local stakeholders will create long-term employment and educational opportunities for surrounding communities. Great Plains are hiring and training new security and monitoring units in Sapi with the aim to meet and exceed ZimParks' recommendation on the number of rangers needed to secure the reserve, including an all-female ranger unit. The data (vegetation, biodiversity numbers, movements of species) collected through monitoring of

"The elephant in this project are being monitored by ZimParks ecologists while supported by experts at Sango and Great Plains Sapi. There is critical observation of the current biodiversity in the Zambezi Valley and implementation in place for anti-poaching and increased research potential with this project. We look forward to continuing the operations next year" - **Tinashe Farawo, spokesperson for ZimParks**

"The project has been a success by any standard. A combination of professional planning and better execution, from the game capture team to the Sapi Reserve ground (release) team. We fitted collars to all 13 relocated herds and 10 resident herds to ascertain movements, use of water sources and integration between resident and non-resident herds. Our researchers and monitors are constantly assessing this behavior and ensuring any potential issues are observed and addressed early and efficiently." **Dr Sven Bourquin Wildlife Operations Coordinator, Great Plains**

"Project Rewild Zambezi will enable Zimbabwe to be better positioned to respond to any future emergency requiring mass wildlife movement," – **Mike La Grange, Wildlife Management Consultant**



all species in the area (not limited to the translocated species) will be shared with the region and government adding to databases to assist in the lack of data recording in the area.

The translocations for 2022 are complete and will resume in next year's dry months. Great Plains are fundraising \$5.5million for this project which encompasses the translocations themselves, ongoing security and monitoring, a fully functional research camp, community engagement programs



“Here at Great Plains, we strongly believe that with wildlife in decline across the globe, we must do what we can to protect and enhance biodiversity, and we are thrilled that we can offer this precious wildlife a new home at Sapi.” – Dereck Joubert, Founder of Great Plains.

Impact

Our highest goals are to relieve the pressure of over-population and adverse conditions in the SVC and to increase wildlife populations in the Zambezi Valley. In doing so, we will initiate one of the largest translocations of wildlife in history and develop a working blueprint for large-scale animal relocations across Africa. To achieve this end, our overarching goals are to:

- 1) Translocate about 3,000 animals from Savé Valley Conservancy to Sapi Reserve and neighboring protected areas.
- 2) Establish a base camp and network of patrol outposts in Sapi to increase anti-poaching efforts and enable field-based research and wildlife monitoring.
- 3) Hire and train a minimum of 24 wildlife and natural resource monitors (including female units) from the surrounding communities to lead monitoring and protection efforts in Sapi.



- 4) Finalize and implement a comprehensive Wildlife and Natural Resource Monitoring Plan for Sapi Reserve aligned with major management plans for the area.
- 5) Establish a research camp in Sapi that offers resources and creates opportunities for collaborative research, implementation, and monitoring with universities/research institutions both internationally and within Zimbabwe
- 6) Apply adaptive management strategies in Sapi Reserve.
- 7) Provide research, practical learning and training opportunities that support the management of Sapi Reserve within the broader Middle Zambezi Biosphere Reserve (MZBR).
- 8) Contribute to the body of research, knowledge, and best practice around large-scale wildlife translocations in Africa

With climate change and resource scarcity threatening species all over the world, it is important to understand whether translocations can provide a viable solution and, if so, how they should be conducted. A properly executed rewilding project would have an unprecedented effect not only on the 3,000 animals that would otherwise have been culled, but also on broader scientific knowledge for ZimParks and the broader MZBR.

A translocation of this scale has never been attempted. To date, we have identified several opportunities for scientific studies that can provide insight into the project's efficacy and reproducibility, in addition to more in-depth analyses around existing human-related environmental crises in the area. The project will require continuous data collection but holds the potential to develop a more robust breeding population in Sapi. Furthermore, we will conduct continuous and intensive monitoring of vegetation and natural resources, which will enable us to develop adaptive management strategies for invasive alien species and prevent extinction of red data species.

Furthermore, increased monitoring in a key Buffer Zone will help inform adaptive management strategies and decision making for the whole MZBR, fortifying our relationships with ZimParks and other key stakeholders including communities. Long term, we hope that the data gathered from this project will build the case to create unified passive management of the conservancies east of Sapi to include in a Greater Zambezi protected area. Unifying these areas would eventually create a Serengeti-sized protected area and open migration corridors for wildlife. It would also afford us the opportunity to block off the illegal wildlife trafficking corridor from Mana Pools to Mozambique.

Project Activities, Implementation, and Timeline

METHODOLOGIES

Translocation: Great Plains will lead translocation efforts from Savé Valley Conservancy to Sapi Reserve in collaboration with SVC's Special Species Protection Unit (SSPU) and Sango Wildlife Lodge & Camp (SANGO). This consignment of animals includes 400 elephants and iconic species like lions, buffalo, impala, zebras, painted dogs, eland, and more.



Full Consignment of Animals to be Translocated	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 elephants • 2000 impala • 70 giraffes* • 50 eland • 50 zebra* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 buffalo • 50 wildebeest* • 10 wild dogs (one pack) • 10 lions (two prides) • 310 other species
<p><i>*Species will be translocated to another ecosystem if there is no scientific proof of their past occurrence in the Sapi Safari Area.</i></p>	

Initial translocation took place during the 2022 dry season (June-September), as outlined in the timeline above. The remainder will be moved during the 2023 dry season.

The translocation process looks different for different species. For some, like impala, “hot releases” are safe and appropriate and mean the animals are released directly from the trucks without any transition required. Elephants spend several hours to a day in a 10-acre boma with access to water and natural browsing before the boma is opened and they move off into their new home. Predators such as wild dogs will spend weeks in a specially constructed boma to help establish/re-establish pack dynamics and encourage the establishment of a home range or territory. In all cases, extensive expert consultation means that utilizing established best practice and animal safety and welfare are the basis of the translocation and release methodology. To reduce risk of homing and body condition declines, in the 2022 moves, an emphasis was placed translocating intact female herds of elephants. Although translocations are costly, and careful selection of groups can increase costs, the potential benefits of translocating intact families may well prove the best way to ensure success. Research to further clarify this connection is one of the projects aims and may thus make an important contribution to elephant conservation and management.

Wildlife Protection and Anti-Poaching: ZimParks and Great Plains will continue working closely with each other, providing ongoing support for the seven ZimParks rangers who currently monitor the area by providing infrastructure improvements to their ranger station in Sapi (G-camp) and continuing to provide rations, fuel, and uniforms for them. We will add Great Plains security detail as per the management plan and responsibility as laid down in the 25-year lease. Great Plains will also provide additional boots on the ground by hiring a minimum of 24 additional rangers/natural resource monitors by the end of 2024, as recommended by an ecological site suitability assessment of Sapi conducted in April of 2020 (Ngorima 2020). Great Plains is now beginning the process of renovating and modernizing the G-Camp ranger station.

Wildlife & Natural Resource Monitoring: The overall objectives of our monitoring protocol include, but are not limited to: 1) Monitoring the broader mammal, bird and invertebrate populations and vegetation to improve our understanding of the system; 2) Recording and quantify potential drivers of change in the ecoregions, wildlife, human or climate induced; 3) Developing adaptive management strategies while continually monitoring system responses to existing management actions; 4) Supporting and providing



information to anti-poaching operations on the ground; and 5) Monitoring priority species (both resident and translocated) to stay informed about the status of the translocated animals and to mitigate any potential human/wildlife conflict in the region.

Research Goals: This initiative sees Great Plains collaborating with the University of Washington-Seattle's Centre for Environmental Forensic Science and Oxford University's Department of Zoology. Academic partnerships will also draw scholars from within Zimbabwe. Non-Academic partnerships include working closely with the Government of Zimbabwe, specifically ZimParks rangers and staff ecologists and building supportive relationships with conservation stakeholders throughout the Zambezi Valley throughout the project. Our aim is to initiate one of the largest translocations of wildlife in history but also to develop a working blueprint for doing large scale relocations across Africa and to produce detailed, relevant, shareable data and research on the translocated wildlife, in particular elephant.

Project Budget

The total budget for this project over a three-year period (2022 - 2024) is \$5,385,652, which includes:

- Translocation costs associated with acquiring, capturing, and relocating the animals, as well as conservation maintenance levies incurred by Savé Valley Conservancy, feeding for animals that must be cared for prior to full release, etc.
- Camp supplies and equipment
- Other project expenses, relating to transportation, animal welfare, consulting fees, telecommunications, and travel
- Personnel costs, including meals and rations for ranger and wildlife monitoring teams as well as uniforms, welfare, salaries, and wages.
- Facilities costs, including rent and property taxes, repairs and maintenance, insurance, and utility and energy costs
- Administrative and permitting fees
- Marketing and fundraising expenses
- Capital expenses tied to preparing and securing the Sapi Reserve including additional patrol vehicles, erecting bomas, infrastructure improvements to road networks, communication networks, and fencing
- Capital expenses, tied to the creation of a permanent monitoring and research camp in the Sapi reserve including camp equipment, solar power, and boreholes.

To date, and in line budget projections, Great Plains Foundation has raised and spent approximately \$1 million dollars on Phase 1 of Project Rewild Zambezi. Fundraising is on-going with additional funds pledged for this project from individual donors and private foundations as well as institutional funders such as National Geographic. Outlined below, in the third and fourth columns are the remaining project expenses.



PROJECT EXPENSES	2022 (Phase 1)	2023 (Phase 2)	2024 (Phase 3)
Translocation Expenses	\$ 626,250.00	\$ 1,208,500.00	\$ -
Equipment & Supplies	\$ 118,768.62	\$ 54,862.50	\$ -
Other Project Expenses	\$ 188,298.00	\$ 263,310.62	\$ 288,914.00
Personnel Costs	\$ 135,210.22	\$ 221,993.61	\$ 228,370.61
Facilities Costs	\$ 257,523.00	\$ 290,075.00	\$ 306,693.00
Administrative	\$ 14,425.00	\$ 22,665.00	\$ 22,665.00
Marketing & Fundraising	\$ 41,000.00	\$ 33,800.00	\$ 11,000.00
TOTAL PROJECT EXPENSES PER YEAR	\$ 1,381,474.83	\$ 2,095,206.72	\$ 857,642.61
CAPEX	\$ 956,628.00	\$ 94,700.00	\$ -
TOTAL PROJECT COST PER YEAR	\$ 2,338,102.83	\$ 2,189,906.72	\$ 857,642.61
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$ 5,385,652.17		

PROJECT TIMELINE

Phase 1 - COMPLETE

January – May 2022:

- Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, baseline vegetation surveys, fundraising, security, ground assessments.
- Formal Memorandum of Understanding signed by Dereck Joubert, Director of Great Plains Foundation; Harry Idensohn, Director of Savé Valley Conservancy; and David Goosen, Director of Sango Wildlife Lodge & Camp.
- Stakeholder meeting convened by Zambezi Valley Conservation Network.

June – September 2022:

- Refurbishments and upgrades to road and communications networks in Sapi.
- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessment and security assessment.
- Draft Wildlife and Natural Resource Monitoring plan for Sapi.
- Baseline vegetation survey.
- Recruit and begin training wildlife monitoring units (including female rangers).
- Construct research camp and deploy camera traps in partnership with Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCru).
- Begin elephant herd characteristics study in collaboration with the University of Washington-Seattle's Centre for Environmental Forensic Science.
- Confirm assembly of scientific advisors (Dr. Luke Hunter, Dr. Sven Bourquin, Dr Sam Wasser, Dr Rosemary Groom, Dr. Richard Hall, Dr Paul Funston, and others).



- Begin camera trapping survey – led by Dr. Andrew Loveridge (Associate Professor, Department of Zoology, Deputy Director, WildCru, Oxford University).
- Continue stakeholder consultations.
- Ongoing fundraising.
- Collar elephants to be translocated in SVC in addition to sample of resident elephants in Sapi.
- Translocate first grouping of animals.

Phase 2

September 2022 – May 2023:

- On-going recruitment and training of wildlife monitoring units.
- Complete Wildlife and Natural Resource Monitoring plan for Sapi.
- Ongoing research/surveys by WildCru and University of Washington-Seattle.
- Identify additional research projects and partnerships including with universities within Zimbabwe.
- Ongoing data-sharing and best practice consultations for translocated animals.

June – September 2023:

- Translocate remaining animals (predators possibly moved into Q1 2024).¹
- Continue recruitment and training of wildlife monitoring units (including female rangers).
- Conduct final wildlife translocations (timeframes are limited due to weather conditions).
- Ongoing research/surveys by WildCru and University of Washington-Seattle.

Phase 3

October 2023 – December 2024:

- Translocate lion and wild dog in Q1 2024.
- Produce final report of elephant research study.
- By end Q4 2024, conclude onboarding a minimum of 24 wildlife monitoring units (including female rangers).
- Ongoing security and monitoring operations.
- Ongoing monitoring of all introduced species for at least three years.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Undoubtedly, we (humans) have made mistakes and will continue to make them for as long as we are alive on planet Earth. What is more important is that we learn from our mistakes and take action to correct them collaboratively. We recognize that it is both insensitive and unsustainable for conservation

¹ Lion and wild dog may be moved in Q1 2024 rather than 2023 based on consultation with lion and wild dog experts and to allow prey numbers to increase after the 2023 translocations. This adjustment is not yet 100% determined and may shift some of the remaining translocation costs represented in the included budget from 2023 to 2024.



experts from high-income worlds to drop into low-income spaces to offer one-way dictated outcomes. We expect this project to spark conversations between conservationists and communities, paving the way for long-term collaboration and sustainable outcomes. Further, by encouraging female rangers to explore higher education and research opportunities, we expect to develop and support local conservation experts prepared to collaborate on the global stage. We want local communities to drive local conservation, and we see long-term relationship-building, education, and mentorship as the avenue. We expect to maintain cultural sensitivity and will hold ourselves accountable to local communities by soliciting feedback from our female ranger teams – as well as their home villages, when possible. Investing in long-term mentorship and education opportunities will ensure that our female rangers are enlisting for more than a job – conservation may very well become their lifework.

We also aim to amplify female Indigenous/Black voices by providing our female rangers a platform on which to share their unique stories and to educate others working in conservation, including our own team, who live apart from their cultural experience. All project trainers, and anyone mentoring the female trainers throughout their training or employment period, will be briefed on organizational policies regarding forms of discrimination and DEI work. We will take care to ensure that all trainers and those serving in a mentorship capacity are fully comfortable acknowledging the ways in which their own personal experiences may differ from the experiences of the female rangers participating in the program, whether because of differences in race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, upbringing, etc. We will seek especially to emphasize the importance of this sensitivity during the next several years when onboarding new female rangers and expanding the diversity, equity, and inclusion of our ranger team.

Feasibility, Risks & Ethical Considerations

Animal Welfare: Inarguably, translocation poses significant risks to animals. However, Great Plains has experience in leading successful animal translocations through our Rhinos Without Borders project. Furthermore, we are able to glean insights from the Rifa translocation in 2019, where 100 elephants were moved from Savé Valley Conservancy to Rifa Safari Area. The same game capturer experts that were used for the translocation in Rifa will be used in our translocation. To minimize the risk of harm to animals during the elephant herd characteristics, candidate groups for translocation are being carefully considered to reduce the potential stress induced by separating closely affiliated individuals. Animals will be corralled and sedated to reduce risk to all parties on the day of translocation.

Carrying Capacity: In April of 2020, an ecological site suitability assessment of Sapi was conducted by a Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority ecologist, a Botanist from the University of Stellenbosch, and a Zoologist from the University of Pretoria. The report highlights that the southern part of Sapi appears to be prime habitat for elephants, as it less utilized than the north. Furthermore, the report states that the Parks staff in Sapi is “self-motivated and knowledgeable” but that they are severely short-staffed. The report recommends at least 24 rangers to cover the area (Ngorima 2020).

Species Suitability: We established in the April survey that all species identified for Sapi were suitable for the ecosystem. However, we have not gathered enough historic evidence to prove that giraffe, zebra, and wildebeest have previously existed in the Sapi ecosystem. We will not translocate animals to Sapi if there



is no scientific evidence of their species having previously occurred there. We continue to consult experts, but in the absence of consensus we have designated a potential alternate translocation destination for both giraffe and wildebeest.

Water access: Stream bank cultivation is causing severe degradation of Zimbabwe’s riverine ecosystems – the effects of which are widespread throughout the MZBR (*Siltation*, 2021). Water access is becoming increasingly sparse, thereby significantly impacting wildlife populations and rural communities, leading to increases in Human-Wildlife Conflict. More comprehensive evaluations of hydrological changes in the area are necessary to inform management decisions for the MZBR.

Poaching: Although poaching remains a persistent threat, the MZBR has seen a decline in poaching incidents over the course of the past few years. The influx of wildlife from this translocation project will necessitate additional boots on the ground, hence our plans to hire 24 additional wildlife monitors.

Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC): Research indicates that HWC is increasing throughout the MZBR – particularly in more urban areas like Lake Kariba and Chirundu. We must anticipate that an increase in wildlife populations competing for water in the area may cause animals to wander into human settlements in Transition Zones south of Mana Pools and Chewore. We are consulting with tribal leadership in these areas to discuss potential mitigation measures. Hiring wildlife monitors from within the MZBR will enable us to integrate Indigenous Local Knowledge into management approaches.

Tourism: Although tourism provides much-needed income from protected areas, the risks can far outweigh the benefits. Without proper planning and management, increased tourism can have detrimental effects on a fragile ecosystem. Great Plains prides itself on light-footprint, high-end, low-volume tourism everywhere that we operate, and the Sapi Reserve is no exception. Great Plains currently operates a single six-room/12-bed camp in the reserve. Each camp utilizes as much sustainable infrastructure as possible, from solar power to composters to bio-digesters, greywater recycling, and the elimination of single-use plastic. Our *leave-no-trace* mentality is infused throughout Great Plains tourism operations in the Sapi Reserve.

Stakeholder Engagement: As with any major project involving change, bureaucratic processes/political interests may present obstacles. We intend to mitigate this risk by keeping clear channels of communication with stakeholders throughout the process. We first held a stakeholder meeting on 12th April 2022, and this was widely attended by Zambezi Valley stakeholder organizations. Individual and bilateral meetings with a wide range of stakeholders have continued since that first meeting and we will continue stakeholder meetings to ensure the project’s success. We have also received the green light from government agencies involved.

Sexual Harassment: To mitigate potential risks related to workplace sexual harassment, we will review and amend our current sexual harassment and anti-discrimination policies as may be necessary. All project trainers, managers, and participants, and rangers associated with this project will be briefed on organizational policies regarding sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and other forms of discrimination. We are also taking special care to provide a secure and private living environment for the women rangers. As an additional safeguarding measure, our clearly defined ‘whistle-blower’ policy will be explained and made available to all.